

THE FLORA AND AVIFAUNA OF THE PROPOSED CARNARVON RANGE CONSERVATION PARK, WESTERN AUSTRALIA, INCLUDING THE NEARBY BLUE HILL PASTORAL LEASE

PART 3 – ANNOTATED BIRD SPECIES LIST

By KEVIN H. COATE
11 Peak View, Canning Vale, WA. 6155

SUMMARY

This paper is based mainly on data gathered during visits by members of the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in August 1998, August 1999, June 2000, and August 2000 to the proposed Carnarvon Range Nature Reserve and the nearby abandoned Blue Hill pastoral lease in the Little Sandy Desert in Western Australia. Also included are data from the August 2001 *Landscape Expedition* and some historical records from Conservation and Land Management (CALM) personnel.

Reference is made of Black Honeyeater eating ash, the occurrence of Painted Finch, Mallee Fowl not previously recorded in the area and birds likely to be found when conditions are favourable. A total of eighty-nine species of bird are recorded, thirty-three non-passerine and fifty-six passerine species. Many of these were poorly or not previously recorded in the area. Breeding records are included. Nomenclature follows Johnstone (2001).

CASUARIIDAE

Emu – *Dromaius novaehollandiae*

Uncommon to common on all visits. Many with young chicks (1–9) up to 70cm high in August 1999.

MEGAPODIDAE

Malleefowl – *Leipoa ocellata*

Rare or uncommon. Reported near Virgin Springs in 1974–1975 (anecdotal to Kenny Farmer, an Aboriginal from Wiluna with strong ties to the area (A. Chapman, pers. com.)).

ANATIDAE

Australian Shelduck – *Tadorna tadornoides*

Uncommon. One recorded at Clayhole in July 1991 (A. Chapman, pers. comm.).

Grey Teal – *Anas gracilis*

Uncommon. Two pairs at Clayhole in July 1991 (A. Chapman pers. com.).

ACCIPITRIDAE

Black-shouldered Kite – *Elanus caeruleus*

Scarce. Two on sand ridge about 1km west of Serpents Glen in August 2000.

Square-tailed Kite – *Hamirostra isura*

Scarce. One near Virgin Springs in August 1999.

Black-breasted Buzzard – *Hamirostra melanosternon*

Uncommon. Two, one carrying nesting material, in a grove of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* close to 25°17'59" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

Whistling Kite – *Haliastur sphenurus*

Scarce. One on two consecutive days at Serpents Glen in August 2001.

Brown Goshawk – *Accipiter fasciatus*

Uncommon. One seen several times at Virgin Springs in August 1999; one near Illyee Pool (south-western section of proposed park); one at Serpents Glen and two at Blue Hill breakaways in August 2001.

Collared Sparrowhawk – *Accipiter cirrocephalus*

Scarce. One recorded several times at Virgin Springs in August 1999.

Little Eagle – *Aquila morphnoides*

Scarce. One at southern end of Carnarvon Range in November 1975 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979).

Wedge-tailed Eagle – *Aquila audax*

Uncommon. Single birds observed

in August 1998 and 1999; and a pair at Serpents Glen in August 2001.

Spotted Harrier – *Circus assimilis*

Scarce. Two above profusely flowering *Grevillea eriostachya* on sandplain at the southern end of Carnarvon Range near M6 in August 1999.

FALCONIDAE

Brown Falcon – *Falco berigora*

Uncommon in ones and twos. Recorded near Miss Fairbairn Hills and southern end of Carnarvon Range.

Australian Kestrel – *Falco cenchroides*

Moderately common in ones, twos and threes. Nest with young at Serpents Glen in August 1999.

Australian Hobby – *Falco longipennis*

Uncommon. One at Serpents Glen and one at Blue Hill, where it was observed to catch a Hooded Robin in August 1999.

Peregrine Falcon – *Falco peregrinus*

Uncommon. Two at breakaways south of Blue Hill in August 1998, one at Serpents Glen in August 2001. Two white downy chicks were in a nest at Blue Hill breakaways (25°19'00" 120°52'56") in August 1999. The nest was on a ledge of a cliff face two metres from the base. Several piles of Crested Pigeon feathers were nearby on top of the breakaway.

OTIDIDAE

Australian Bustard – *Otis australis*

Uncommon. Single birds recorded at Tabimaya Well and Blue Hill in August 1998 and 1999; remains of a recently killed, half-grown bird near Peregrine Falcon nest at Blue Hill breakaways in August 1999; three on the eastern boundary in August 2000 and one close to Clay Hole, south of Miss Fairbairn Hills in August 2001.

TURNICIDAE

Little Button-quail – *Turnix velox*

Uncommon. Mainly in small groups. Recorded near Good Camp Rockhole, southwest of Miss Fairbairn Hills and at Blue Hill breakaway.

CHARADRIIDAE

Black-fronted Dotterel – *Charadrius melanops*

Uncommon. Three at Clayhole in July 1991 (A. Chapman pers. comm.).

Inland Dotterel – *Peltohyas australis*

Scarce. One on flat stony area at Blue Hills in August 2001.

COLUMBIDAE

Common Bronzewing – *Phaps chalcoptera*

Moderately common in ones and twos throughout the area.

Crested Pigeon – *Ocyphaps lophotes*

Common around rockholes in August 1998 and 1999; uncommon in 2000 and 2001. Nest with 2 eggs in *Callitris glaucophylla* in an

unburnt gully near Serpents Glen in August 2001.

Spinifex Pigeon – *Geophaps plumifera*

Rare or uncommon. About 12 recorded near Mt. Methwin in May 1975 (Reid 1976).

Diamond Dove – *Geopelia cuneata*

Common to moderately common around rockholes and breakaways e.g. up to 100 at Good Camp Rockhole in August 1999 and Talbot Rockhole in 2001. Uncommon elsewhere.

PSITTACIDAE

Galah – *Cacatua roseicapilla*

Moderately common in small numbers in August 1998, 1999 and 2000; otherwise scarce, two at Serpents Glen in August 2001.

Little Corella – *Cacatua sanguinea*

Uncommon. Breeding in a grove of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* trees on the southwest boundary near 25°17'57" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

Ring-necked Parrot – *Platycercus zonarius*

Moderately common near creeks and rockholes on all visits. Breeding at Serpents Glen in August 1999.

Mulga Parrot – *Platycercus varius*

Common in mulga woodland in August 1998, 1999 and 2000 otherwise scarce in unburnt areas of mulga woodland. Breeding at Serpents Glen in August 1999.

Budgerigar – *Melopsittacus undulatus*

Common in small flocks throughout the area in August 1999; scarce in small flocks (5–6) near Miss Fairbairn Hills and at Blue Hill breakaway in August 2001.

Bourke's Parrot – *Neophema bourkii*

Moderately common in small flocks (up to 8). Recorded at Tabimaya Well, Blue Hill and nearby breakaways and south of Miss Fairbairn Hills.

CUCULIDAE

Pallid Cuckoo – *Cuculus pallidus*

Moderately common throughout the area in August 1998 and 1999; uncommon in August 2000 and 2001.

Black-eared Cuckoo – *Chrysococcyx osculans*

Scarce. Two at southern end of Carnarvon Range in November 1975 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979).

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo – *Chrysococcyx basalis*

Moderately common in August 1998 and 1999; uncommon, several between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole in August 2001. A juvenile being fed by Chestnut-rumped Thornbill (*Acanthiza uropygialis*) at Good Camp Rockhole in August 1999.

STRIGIDAE

Boobook Owl – *Ninox novaeseelandiae*

Uncommon. One calling at Virgin Springs in August 1999.

TYTONIDAE

Barn Owl – *Tyto alba*

One at southern end of Carnarvon Range in March 1976 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979). One calling at night at Good Camp Rockhole in October 1993 (A. Chapman pers. comm.).

PODARGIDAE

Tawny Frogmouth – *Podargus strigoides*

Uncommon. Two flushed from small tree on steep slope below M6 and two at Blue Hill breakaways in August 2001.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

Spotted Nightjar – *Eurostopodus argus*

Uncommon. Heard at Serpents Glen in August 1998, 1999 and 2001.

AEGOTHELIDAE

Australian Owlet-nightjar – *Aegotheles cristatus*

Moderately common at rock holes and Serpents Glen in August 1998, 1999 and 2001. Two flushed from hollow limbs of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* at Talbot Rockhole in August 2001. Young in nest at Kadyara Waterhole in August 1999.

HALCYONIDAE

Red-backed Kingfisher – *Todiramphus pyrrhopygia*

Uncommon. One pair near southwest boundary in August

2000 and one near Talbot Rockhole in August 2001.

CLIMACTERIDAE

White-browed Treecreeper – *Climacteris affinis*

Uncommon. One in tall Mulga woodland at Blue Hill in August 1999.

MALURIDAE

Variegated Fairy-wren – *Malurus lamberti*

Uncommon. One family group at Serpents Glen in August 1998; another near southwest boundary in August 2000; moderately common in *Triodia* sp. and *Aluta maisonneuvii* between Serpents Glen and Talbots Rockhole and in unburnt acacia woodland near M6 in August 2001.

White-winged Fairy-wren – *Malurus leucopterus*

Moderately common in heathlands.

Rufous-crowned Emu-wren – *Stipiturus ruficeps*

Moderately common in *Triodia* sp. and *Aluta maisonneuvii* between Serpents Glen and Talbots Rockhole (25°10'9" 120°41'2") in August 2001.

Striated Grasswren – *Amytornis striatus*

Scarce. One in spinifex at southern end of Carnarvon Range in May 1990 (A Chapman pers. com.); also reported between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole in June 1991 (J. Blyth

pers. comm.). Probably more common than indicated, due to their secretive nature.

PARDALOTIDAE

Red-browed Pardalote – *Pardalotus rubricatus*

Scarce. In ones and twos at Talbot Rockhole and Serpents Glen.

Striated Pardalote – *Pardalotus striatus*

Uncommon. Several at Serpents Glen in August 1998 and 2001, and near the southwest boundary in August 2000.

ACANTHIZIDAE

Weebill – *Smicrornis brevirostris*

Moderately common in small flocks in eucalyptus trees in gullies and near southwest boundary in August 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Western Gerygone – *Gerygone fusca*
Moderately common at Virgin Springs, Serpents Glen and Muir's Pool in August 1999 and also heard at Talbot Rockhole in August 2001.

Inland Thornbill – *Acanthiza apicalis*

Moderately common. Recorded at Serpents Glen, near southwest boundary and in unburnt areas between Serpents Glen and Talbots Rockhole.

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill – *Acanthiza uropygialis*

Moderately common in small groups (up to 8) on all visits.

Slaty-backed Thornbill –

Acanthiza robustirostris

Moderately common in ones and twos on all visits. A pair feeding young just out of nest near southwest boundary in August 2000.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill –

Acanthiza chrysorrhoa

Uncommon. Recorded in August 1999; and several in unburnt areas of mulga woodland between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole in August 2001. Nest with small young at southern end of Carnarvon Range near M6 in August 1999.

Southern Whiteface –

Aphelocephala leucopsis

Uncommon in August 1999; several at Blue Hill in August 2001. Breeding at Blue Hill in August 1999.

Banded Whiteface – *Aphelocephala nigricincta*

Scarce. Small flock at Blue Hill in August 2000.

MELIPHAGIDAE

Brown Honeyeater – *Lichmera indistincta*

Common on all visits. Attracted to thickets of flowering *Grevillea wickhamii* and *Grevillea spinosa* in gullies and around base of hills. Nest with 2 eggs near Good Camp Rockhole in August 1999 and nest with 2 eggs in *Acacia rhodophloia* near M6 in August 2001.

Black Honeyeater – *Certhionyx niger*

Moderately common in August 1998; common in August 1999; not recorded in August 2000; and scarce (2) between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole in August 2001. Nest with 2 eggs on a dry limb about two metres up in a dead acacia tree near Serpents Glen in August 1999. Up to 3 females at one time observed over several days collecting ash and small lumps of charcoal from two old campfires and a campfire that contained glowing coals. Birds were observed swallowing ash while on the ground, but at other times would fly to a branch on an adjacent Mulga tree before swallowing. A fresh bird dropping, probably from a Black Honeyeater, on a tent close to where the birds were coming into the campfire, contained a small lump of charcoal in August 1999.

Pied Honeyeater – *Certhionyx variegatus*

Moderately common, especially around flowering grevillea in August 1998 and 1999; scarce; recorded near southern end of Carnarvon Range in August 2000; but not recorded in August 2001.

Singing Honeyeater – *Meliphaga virescens*

Moderately common in August 1999; uncommon in August 2000 and 2001.

Grey-headed Honeyeater – *Meliphaga keartlandi*

Moderately common in March 1976 and November 1975 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979).

Grey-fronted Honeyeater –
Meliphaga plumula

Scarce. Several on Neds Creek track west of Carnarvon Range in August 2000.

White-plumed Honeyeater –
Meliphaga penicillata

Moderately common. Juveniles at rockhole near M6 at 25°16.90' 120°41.42' in October 1993 (A Chapman pers. comm.); and moderately common in *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* woodland southwest boundary near 25°17'57" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

White-fronted Honeyeater –
Phylidonyris albigularis

Very common throughout the area in August 1999. Attracted to flowering *Grevillea spinosa*, *Grevillea eriostachya* and *Grevillea juncifolia*; scarce; only one record, a bird attracted to flowering *Grevillea eriostachya* in August 2000. Common; and attracted to flowering *Hakea lorea* in unburnt areas between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole in August 2001.

Yellow-throated Miner –
Manorina flavigula

Moderately common on all visits.

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater –
Acanthagenys rufogularis

Very common in August 1999, attracted to flowering *Grevillea spinosa*, *Grevillea eriostachya* and *Grevillea juncifolia*; scarce in August 2000 and moderately common in August 2000 in unburnt areas.

Crimson Chat – *Epthianura tricolor*

Uncommon in small flocks (up to 30) often in company with Black-faced Woodswallow in August 1999. They appeared to be moving through the area in a northeasterly direction. Also several single birds at Blue Hill breakaway in August 2001.

Orange Chat – *Epthianura aurifrons*

Recorded at Lake Kerrylyn in June 1991 (J. Blyth pers. comm.).

EOPSALTRIIDAE

Red-capped Robin – *Petroica goodenovii*

Scarce to common in August 1999 and 2000; and moderately common in August 2001. 3 nests with eggs, 1 nest with young and 1 nest being built in August 1999.

Hooded Robin – *Petroica cucullata*

Uncommon to moderately common at Blue Hill (one seen taken by Australian Hobby); scarce elsewhere.

POMATOSTOMIDAE

Grey-crowned Babbler –
Pomatostomus temporalis

Scarce; a small party at Blue Hill in August 1999 and 2001.

White-browed Babbler –
Pomatostomus superciliosus

Uncommon to moderately common. Recorded at Serpents Glen and southwest boundary.

CINCLOSOMATIDAE

Chiming Wedgebill – *Psophodes occidentalis*

Scarce. Heard near Virgin Springs in August 1999.

Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush – *Cinclosoma castaneothorax*

Moderately common near rocky areas; e.g. Miss Fairbairn Hills, Blue Hill breakaway, and on rocky area on the track west from Serpents Glen.

NEOSITTIDAE

Varied Sittella – *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*

Uncommon. Small flock of eight at southern end of Carnarvon Range in 1975 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979).

PACHYCEPHALIDAE

Crested Bellbird – *Oreoica gutturalis*

Moderately common on all visits.

Rufous Whistler – *Pachycephala rufiventris*

Moderately common in ones and twos throughout the area. Breeding at Serpents Glen in August 1999.

Grey Shrike-thrush – *Colluricincla harmonica*

Moderately common around rockholes and in gullies in the ranges.

DICRURIDAE

Willie Wagtail – *Rhipidura leucophrys*

Moderately common throughout the area.

Maggie Lark – *Grallina cyanoleuca*
Moderately common in August 1998, 1999 and 2000; uncommon in August 2001. A disused nest in *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* near 25°17'57" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike – *Coracina novaehollandiae*

Common over much of the area in August 1998, 1999 and 2000; scarce in August 2001.

Ground Cuckoo-shrike – *Coracina maximal*

Uncommon to moderately common. A group of three and one of two on the track west of the Carnarvon Range in August 2000; and three south of Miss Fairbairn Hills, five at southern boundary near M6 and three at Blue Hill in August 2001.

White-winged Triller – *Lalage tricolor*

Moderately common in August 1998 and 1999; uncommon between Serpents Glen and Talbot Rockhole on flowering *Hakea lorea* in August 2001.

ARTAMIDAE

Masked Woodswallow – *Artamus personatus*

Moderately common. Small flocks at southern end of Carnarvon Range in November 1975 (Johnstone *et al.* 1979); also a small flock in transit at Blue Hill in August 2001.

Black-faced Woodswallow – *Artamus cinereus*

Common over much of the area in August 1998, 1999 and 2000 and several small flocks in August 2001.

Little Woodswallow – *Artamus minor*

Moderately common around cliff faces in August 1998 and 1999; scarce in August 2000 and 2001.

CRACTICIDAE

Grey Butcherbird – *Cracticus torquatus*

Moderately common on all visits. Large young in nest at Virgin Springs and Serpents Glen in August 1999.

Pied Butcherbird – *Cracticus nigrogularis*

Moderately common in August 1998, 1999 and 2000; uncommon, one at western end of the park and one near Serpents Glen and two at Blue Hill in August 2001.

Australian Magpie – *Cracticus tibicen*

Uncommon. Two at Blue Hill in August 1999; two near south-west boundary in August 2000; and two at Serpents Glen in August 2001.

CORVIDAE

Torresian Crow – *Corvus orru*

Uncommon. Recorded in August 1999 and 2001. A nest with small young in a *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* tree at Serpents Glen in August 1999, and an occupied nest in a *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* tree near southwest boundary in August 2000.

Little Crow – *Corvus bennetti*

Uncommon. Several in August 1999.

PTILONORHYNCHIDAE

Western Bowerbird – *Ptilonorhynchus maculatus*

Uncommon. Recorded at Virgin Springs, Serpents Glen (several in the vicinity of a bower) and at Blue Hill.

MOTACILLIDAE

Richards Pipit – *Anthus novaeseelandiae*

Moderately common throughout the area in August 1999; several on track near southwest boundary in August 2000; and moderately common at Blue Hill (not seen elsewhere) in August 2001.

PASSERIDAE

Zebra Finch – *Taeniopygia guttata*

Common in small flocks (up to 30) in August 1999; several small flocks up to fifteen at Blue Hill in 2001; scarce elsewhere with no more than seven recorded. Breeding profusely: Eggs and young at all stages in *Acacia tetragonophylla* trees close to southwest boundary near 25°17'57" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

Painted Finch – *Emblema pictum*

Moderately common at Good Camp Rockhole (flocks up to 20) in August 1999.

DICAEIDAE

Mistletoebird – *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*

Moderately common in August 1999, 2000 and 2001.

HIRUNDINIDAE

White-backed Swallow –
Cheramoeca leucosterna

Scarce. Two flying above sand dunes west of Serpents Glen in August 2000, and several over Blue Hill breakaways in August 2001.

Tree Martin – *Hirundo nigricans*

Moderately common around groves of *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* trees close to southwest boundary in August 2000; scarce in August 2001. A number nesting in hollow limbs near 25°17'57" 120°22'20" in August 2000.

Fairy Martin – *Hirundo ariel*

Not recorded. Disused nests at Serpents Glen and Blue Hill breakaways in August 1999.

SYLVIIDAE

Rufous Songlark – *Cincloramphus mathewsi*

Uncommon. Several near southwest corner of park in August 2000, and one at Blue Hill in August 2001.

Brown Songlark – *Cincloramphus cruralis*

Scarce. One near Serpents Glen in August 1999.

DISCUSSION

During their reconnaissance of the area in August 1998 Kevin and Yvonne Coate found the country

to be reasonably dry though most rock holes in the ranges were full of water. In August 1999 it would be difficult to imagine the area having more favourable conditions for birds. There was an abundance of water and flowering plants, especially over the sand plains and sand dunes where *Grevillea eriostachya* and *Grevillea juncifolia* were flowering profusely. In the sandstone ranges and rocky gullies *Grevillea spinosa*, various *Acacia* sp. and *Eremophila* sp. were also flowering at their peak. Nomadic birds, especially honeyeaters (e.g. White-fronted Honeyeater, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Black Honeyeater) usually associated with these conditions were very obvious everywhere.

In August 2000 although conditions along the southern sections of the proposed park were excellent after good earlier rains, there was a marked scarcity of birds, especially nomadic honeyeaters. It may be that vegetation associated with earlier heavier rains to the north was more attractive (Kevin and Yvonne Coate and Robert and Maureen Skeet visited the Calvert Range approximately 300kms to the north-east in June 2000 where conditions were similar to the Carnarvon Range in 1999 and found the above mentioned honeyeaters abundant).

Female Black Honeyeater often appear to have a compulsive urge to eat ash and charcoal during their breeding season, the reason for which is unclear. In August 1999 while camped at Serpents Glen I closely observed birds

eating ash and charcoal. Normally they are shy birds, they showed little fear of the close proximity to humans while eating the ash. This behaviour has been previously recorded (Coate 1985, 1987). It would be interesting for someone to research Black Honeyeater and determine what benefits they receive from this behaviour.

The occurrence of Painted Finch in reasonably good numbers in August 1999, was most likely due to the exceptional seasonal conditions. In exceptionally good seasons during 1973 and 1974 Painted Finch were recorded about 500 km to the south near Menzies and also near Leonora (Reid 1975).

Rufous-crowned Emu-wren and Striated Grasswren, normally rarely seen, may be more widely spread than indicated as the preferred spinifex and low shrubbery is reasonably plentiful.

Anecdotal evidence of Mallee Fowl reported near Virgin Springs in 1974 and 1975 suggest they may have been more widely spread than previously thought. Although they have not since been recorded and no sign of nesting mounds have been located, there are pockets of habitat where they could turn up in favourable seasons.

Visits by the Western Australian Naturalists' Club in mainly good seasons and the visit by LANDSCOPE Expeditions in 2001, after extensive areas near the range had been burnt eight months previously, have added to the understanding of the avifauna of this spectacular arid

zone area. There is no doubt that there are many more species as yet unrecorded, particularly in some of the semi-permanent waterholes near Tabimaya Well in the north, and Illyee Pool and Clayhole south of Miss Fairbairn Hills on the south-western boundary. When filled with water, these areas would almost certainly attract waterfowl and waterbirds such as Australian Wood Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*), Pacific Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*), Pink-eared Duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*), Hard head (*Aythya australis*), Australasian Grebe (*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*), Hoary-headed Grebe (*Poliocephalus poliocephalus*), White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*), Black-tailed Native-hen (*Gallinula ventralis*) and White-necked Heron (*Ardea pacifica*). Lake Kerrylyn, during rare occasions when it contains water, would most likely attract waders, such as Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Red-necked Avocet (*Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*) and Red-kneed Dotterel (*Erythronyx cinctus*).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to – Maureen and Robert Skeet for their companionship in June 2000 on the reconnaissance trip to the Carnarvon and Calvert Ranges – Ron Johnstone of the Western Australian Museum, for commenting on the paper – John Blyth and Andrew Chapman of Conservation and Land Management, for additional

unpublished historical bird information.

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